

NURSE'S WORK ENGAGEMENT: DOES JOB FEEDBACK MATTERS?**Noraini Othman**College of Business
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saari@uum.edu.my**ABSTRACT**

Nurses play an important role in delivering quality healthcare services to the patients. They form the main and biggest group of healthcare professionals. This study examined the relationship between job feedback and work engagement using a sample of 290 staff nurses working in two public hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. Statistical results using regression analysis indicated that job feedback was positively related to work engagement. Implications of the results are discussed, together with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Field of Research: work engagement, job feedback, nurses

1. INTRODUCTION

The greatest strength and asset of any service-based organizations is their customer-contact employees (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). Hence, the challenge faced by service organizations is essentially on how to motivate customer-contact employees to effectively perform their roles so that they are able to deliver the quality service that meets the expected service benchmarks set by these organizations. Bienstock, DeMoranville, and Smith (2003) argued that managing customer-contact employees' performance is crucial in service organizations due to the influential effect that these employees have on service quality. Many service organizations are subjected to failure in service delivery because they must depend on customer-contact employees to deliver service to their customers (Bienstock, et al., 2003).

In healthcare organizations, nurses as customer-contact employees have been an important component of the medical profession. They contribute to the health and well-being of society in a country. Nurses' performance has a strong influence on the nature and quality of service provided to the patients (Chen et al., 2009; Purdy et al., 2010). Past studies have found nurses' attitudes and behaviours as significant in determining the quality of healthcare services (Cohen & Golan, 2007; Al-Ahmadi, 2008). As nurses play an essential role in representing healthcare organization's competence, their attitudes and behaviours toward patients would significantly affect patients' service quality and satisfaction (Moritz et al., 1989). Therefore, in order to deliver the quality service, nurses should perform in favourable work attitude, which known as work engagement. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) proposed work engagement as one of the positive states, which is opposite of burnout based on the emergence of positive psychology – the scientific study of human strength and optimal functioning. According to Schaufeli et al. (2006), engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective relation with their job, and more likely to perceive that they are capable of managing their job demands. Similarly, a study by Schaufeli and Van Rhenen (2006) has shown that engaged employees often experienced positive emotions, and this might be the reason why they are more productive.

To promote high work engagement, nurses as boundary-spanners of healthcare institutions need to have more job feedback. Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen (2009) argued that work environments that provide abundant resources foster the willingness of employees to dedicate their efforts and abilities to the work task. This situation will ensure that the task will be completed successfully and the work goal will be achieved. For instance, co-workers support and performance feedback increase the probability of being successful in achieving one's work goals, which in turn, leads to greater work engagement. Hence, this study sought to investigate the relationship between job feedback and work engagement in nursing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Work Engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Vigor refers to "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003a, p. 5). Dedication is characterized by "being strongly involved in work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003a, p. 5). Absorption is defined as "being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003a, p. 5). According to Bakker et al. (2008), work engagement is important as engaged employees experience pleasure and joy, enjoy good physical and psychological health, display better job performance, able to increased ability to create job and personal resources, and capable to transfer their engagement to others.

Past studies have found that a high level of work engagement is associated to better job performance, higher organizational commitment, lower absenteeism, and lower turnover rates (Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

2.2 Job Feedback

Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1980) defined feedback as the degree to which the employee receives clear information about his or her performance. A job that is low in feedback may not reinforce an employee's personal assessment of how well he/she is performing (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Bassett (1994) argued that feedback is the most effective tool in improving employee's performance. Moreover, Chu and Chu (1991) argued that feedback is important to nurses because their effectiveness depends greatly on the information they obtain through various channels. They further argued that a majority of healthcare organizations develop proper performance evaluation systems to ensure greater cost-effectiveness.

Past studies have found a positive relationship between job feedback and work engagement. For instance, a meta-analysis by Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011) found that job characteristics were positively related to work engagement. Similarly, Bakker and Bal (2010) discovered that job characteristics of 56 Dutch teachers from training colleges were positively associated with weekly work engagement. In another study by Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) using samples from 386 technology employees working in Spain and 338 telecom managers from Netherlands, found that job resources (job control, task variety, and feedback) have positive relationship with work engagement.

In addition, empirical research has shown that supervisor feedback is positively related to job satisfaction among sales personnel (e.g., Teas & Horrell, 1981; Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1982), commitment (e.g., Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1993; Johlke, Duham, Howell, & Wilkes, 2000), and negatively associated with role ambiguity (e.g., Teas, 1983; Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1993).

Based on the above discussion, we expect that:

Hypothesis: Job feedback is positively related to work engagement.

3. METHOD

3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study was conducted in two public hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. After obtaining approval from Malaysian Ministry of Health, a total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to staff nurses with the assistance of the Matron Office of the two participating hospitals.

Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires within two weeks. Completed questionnaires were submitted to the Matron's office. Head of Matron placed all the completed questionnaires into a stamped envelope provided by the researcher. The Head of Matron at each participating hospital subsequently mailed the completed questionnaires to the researcher. The distribution and collection of the completed questionnaires took about one month. Of the 300 questionnaires distributed, a number of 290 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 96.67%.

3.2 Measures

Work Engagement

A shortened nine-item version of the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003b) was used to measure work engagement. This UWES-9 consists of three dimensions, which are measured with three items each: vigor, dedication and absorption. Respondents reported on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "never" to 7 = "always". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.90. For the purpose of analyses, an overall work engagement factor score will be computed. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) stated that the total score for work engagement may sometimes be more practical in empirical research as the moderate to high correlations between the dimensions.

Job Feedback

Job feedback was measured with three items by Hackman and Oldham (1975). All items were measured on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "very inaccurate" to 7 = "very accurate". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.74

Demographic factors

Gender, marital status, age, race, organizational tenure, job tenure and educational qualification were also requested.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 displays some of the demographic characteristics of the sample. Our sample comprised of 5 males (1.7%) and 285 females (98.3%). Majority of the respondents were married (62.4%), while the remaining 37.6% of the respondents were unmarried. The average age of the respondents was 30.37 years and had been working in the current hospital for an average of 5.81 years. Nurses have been in nursing profession for an average of 6.63 years. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of the respondents were Malays (88.6%), followed by Indians (6.6%), Chinese (3.1%), and other races (1.7%).

Table 2 demonstrates the descriptive statistics such as mean scores, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations of the study variables. As shown in Table 2, on the average, the level of work engagement ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 0.83$), and job feedback ($M = 5.64$,

SD = 0.80), was perceived highly by respondents. The Cronbach's alpha values for the study variables were above 0.80, which meets the minimum acceptable standard of 0.7 for exploratory research as suggested by Hair et al. (2006). Our correlation analysis found the significant correlation between job feedback and work engagement ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	285	98.3
	Male	5	1.7
Marital Status	Married	181	62.4
	Unmarried	109	37.6
Ethnicity	Malay	257	88.6
	Indian	9	3.1
	Chinese	5	1.7
	Others	19	6.6
Educational Qualification	Basic Training	227	78.3
	Post Basic Training	63	21.7
		Mean	SD
Age (year)		30.37	7.41
Organizational Tenure (year)		5.81	6.07
Job Tenure (year)		6.63	6.85

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities of the Study Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Work Engagement	Job Feedback
Work Engagement	5.15	0.83	(0.84)	
Job Feedback	5.64	0.80	0.34**	(0.82)

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. Figures in parentheses denote the reliability coefficients for the study variables.

This study also examined the relationship between job feedback and work engagement using a two-step hierarchical regression analysis as presented in Table 3. Demographic variables such as age, marital status, education, organizational tenure and job tenure were statistically controlled (Koyuncu et al., 2006; Mauno et al., 2007). As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, control variables accounted for 2% of the variance in work engagement ($r^2 = 0.02$, f -change = 1.58, $p < 0.01$). All the five control variables were found to be unrelated to work engagement. In model 2, by adding the predictor variable, the r^2 increased to 0.14. This

result shows that the predictor variable was able to explain an additional 12% of the variance related with work engagement (r^2 change = 0.12, f -change = 38.11, $p < 0.001$). Job feedback was found to have a positive and significant relationship with work engagement ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), thereby, supporting our hypothesis.

Table 3: Results of Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable	Work Engagement	
Independent Variable	Model 1 Std. β	Model 2 Std. β
Step 1: Control Variables	0.01	0.01
Age	- 0.16	- 0.11
Marital Status	- 0.17	- 0.03
Education	0.02	0.03
Organizational Tenure	- 0.00	- 0.01
Job Tenure		
Step 2: Predictor Variable		0.39***
Job Feedback		
F-value	1.58	7.84***
R^2	0.02	0.14
Adjusted R^2	0.01	0.12
R^2 Change	0.02	0.12
F-Change	1.58	38.11***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Dummy Coded: Marital Status (unmarried = 0, married = 1); and Education (basic training = 0, post basic training = 1).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of job feedback on work engagement. Results found that job feedback was a significant predictor of work engagement. Our finding is in line with those of previous researchers (Christian et al., 2011; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Findings support the need for organizations to create resourceful environments; as such environments may naturally foster the willingness of nurses to dedicate their efforts and abilities to the work task. The current nurse-to-patient ratio in Malaysia is 1:347 (New Straits Times, May 7, 2012), indicates that existing nurses have more workload and greater responsibilities. According to Worthington (2001) and Beyea, Hicks, and Becker (2003), understaffing leads to a hurried working environment, reduced attention to work details, diminished quality of care, and increased medication error rate. Furthermore, Meurier,

Vincent, and Parmar (1998) noted that errors attributable to human factors frequently cause more serious outcomes. Phillips et al. (2001) conducted a study of 469 fatal medication errors which happened from year 1993 to 1998. The study found that human factors played the most important role (65.2%), mostly because of deficiencies in performance and knowledge (44%). Therefore, frequent job feedback given by nurse supervisors and hospital administrators would enable nurses to know how well they are performing, which in turn, leads to lower medication error rate.

As for implications, since job feedback effects work engagement, it would be worthwhile for hospital administrations and the Ministry of Health to provide the necessary job resources for staff nurses to enable them to become more engaged in their work. Specifically, the supervisors (sisters) should provide more help and information, and constructive feedback. The public hospital administrations should also conduct frequent job feedback exercise. These are to ensure that staff nurses know how well they are performing. It is believed that good supervisory support and constructive feedback will enhance work engagements, which in turn, leads to higher job performance among public hospital nurses.

A limitation of this study is that only one predictor variable (job feedback) was examined. Other job characteristics such as autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance and others may play an important role in predicting work engagement. Future researchers may wish to expand the scope of this study by focusing on these variables. Furthermore, this study is limited to staff nurses working in public hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. The same research could be expanded and replicated among other healthcare personnel, such as doctors, and medical assistants from public and private hospitals. Larger samples from the same industry would improve the generalization of the findings. In addition, the same research could also be duplicated for other industries such as manufacturing.

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